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ABSTRACT

Canada is facing a constitutional crisis. The political options cannot be disentangled from educational considerations and all have crucial implications for the educational future of the nation. The most recent Canadian assessment and appraisal work does not go to the heart of the matter and is subject to both logical and methodological difficulties. Fortuitously, however, work done in connection with the American bicentennial affords high quality studies that deserve to be considered in the present Canadian "crossroads" context. This paper seeks to provide such a consideration and to critique the educational policy-making practice. Guidelines for trustees are necessary if the pathologies of reactive incrementalism and pseudo-synoptic rationalism are to be avoided. Such guidelines are posed with respect to a putative period of "re-Confederation." (Author/IRT)

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Re-Evaluating Canadian Education in a Time of Constitutional Crisis

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All evaluation, and hence all policy-making, in education or out of it, is founded on assumptions, assumptions which not only take the form of belief rather than truth but which are, worse, often unconscious and therefore not even available for examination or critique. Let me try at the outset, then, to declare some of the assumptions, basic to this paper, of which I am only too conscious, leaving the unconscious content to the more acute perceptions of the audience.

In the first place I assume that there is a constitutional crisis. Next, I assume that this crisis will be resolved in a way which will leave the Canadian polity and its political geography much the same as it is today. Also, of all the scenarios possible in an admittedly imponderable future, I would select those which would result in a changed constitution, and by constitution I do not mean simply that which is written. There is still sufficient of the British cultural tradition in Canadian institutions, including education, to ensure the precedence of *de facto* over *de jure*. Fortunately, and I am proud to say it, there is also a heritage from this some cultural tradition of what the French call "le fairplay." In consequence, our pragmatic workings at all levels of policy are leavened by various considerations of equity. Lastly, it can surely be assumed that education can never be divorced from politics. These days both the public and their trustees need hardly be convinced that education is squarely within the political arena.

In Canada an attempt to delineate this arena was made in our *de jure* Constitution. *De facto*, of course, neither Provs nor Feds have been immaculate in their observance of the constitutional principles and so, let us consider briefly, two recent attempts at examining national education in a country which, in one sense, doesn't have any such thing.

Dr. Lauwerys attempted such an overview in 1973 for the Canadian Education Association by means of a questionnaire survey about the purposes, role, and effectiveness of Canadian schools.[1] As the author admits, it was not a scientifically random sample and I shall skip over the methodological critique simply noting that there is evidence of bias in sampling and that the data interpretation was, again admittedly, highly subjective -- an

instance of what is technically known in the trade as N=1. Yet the effort is praiseworthy and valuable and its author is a learned scholar and skilled observer. The conclusions cannot be dismissed. Consider the most general one: "that there is no serious dissatisfaction...with the general orientation of the school system." And "an overriding concern [with] ... protection of the individual against too powerful influence of state and society." And to these let me add my own N=1 interpretation of the data. The Canadian public, by and large, thick and thin, high and low, Anglo and Franco, are rather smug and self-satisfied about their educational institution. It doesn't scintillate, dazzle the beholder, fascinate the foreign observer but -- as schooling systems go it is solid, pedestrian, bourgeois, and pragmatically sound. Amen!

More recently we had a more high-powered, though not necessarily more scientific, overview of the scene in the form of the O.E.C.D. examination of educational policy in Canada.[2] Again I shall not dwell on the methodological defects -- this time N=5 and one might say that we had five foreign faculty figures on a fleeting flying furlough, facetiously speaking -- but *au contraire,* the foreign eyes are fresh and learned and their report is considered, careful and cautious, so deserving of respectful reading.

The main point of interest is perhaps the tacit endorsement of Lauwerys' earlier study. The examiners concluded that Canada is a favoured country which has "few really serious political and economic crises"[3] and which has a *modus operandi* in education that is "not only tolerated, but accepted happily by most Canadians [because they feel that most things to date have gone along quite well] ..."[4] In other words, a spirit or sense of smug complacency. (And a disinterest in revolution.)

Another conclusion merits direct quotation: "In distinction from most other comparable industrial countries, Canada has neither produced a politically motivated educational reform, rooted in a conception of the country's future, nor has Canada blocked such a reform, as has happened in a number of European countries... [There is] no explicitly stated, overall national conception of the country's interests."[5] I do not see how this

quite squares with the recent history of Quebec nor do I quite follow the logic of how one can block a reform which one has never produced but the essential gist is clear. Canadian education is self-satisfied, without romantic vision or reformist rationale, pragmatic in policy, incremental in growth, muddling on through. So let us next do what all good Canadians must. Look South.

The U.S. has had two centuries of educational history. By way of a bicentennial project Phi Delta Kappa prepared a five-volume set of perspectives on American education and I would like to draw your attention to two of these works, Stephen Bailey's The Purposes of Education[6] and Max Lerner's Values in Education.[7] Both are profound essays, each based on a lifetime of experience with the topic. I can recommend them but cannot deal with them here save to note certain things. There is a full recognition of the ethnic diversity of modern America; of the failed melting pot, but no talk of constitutional change. (Only some unhappiness with the constitutional phrase "the pursuit of happiness.) Instead, there is a concern with the very meaning of education in a society which has become increasingly technological and bureaucratic, increasingly locked into an uncontrollable systems network of international interdependencies. Bailey sees the educational institution as all pervasive having functions to perform through every stage of human development from infancy to old age and dealing with the three basic existential domains of work, leisure, and what he interestingly calls "coping." (Rhetorically, one might ask does Canadian education help us to "cope?" Or is the solution part of the problem?) Yet there is nothing radical in his practical suggestions as to how the classical goal of "improving the quality of life" is to be achieved save, perhaps, a reduction of the school week from five days to four. The point for us, however, is that there is no concern with nationalism or defence of the culture as such, nor any radicalism either. Rather there is a dawning fear of technology. Perhaps our colleagues to the south are all already into the multi-national, post-industrial era in a way which has not yet affected the consciousness of Canadian educators.

Lerner's book has a central concern, a perceived dissatisfaction with American education after 200 years. There are hints and nuances of moral degeneracy, confusion of values, and the Decline of the West. What has happened to Eden?, he asks. What Eden?, a Canadian might ask. Still, he shares Bailey's concept of educational purpose, improving the quality of the whole of life from birth to death. And he would seek this through an educational administration that subscribed to a "reverse hierarchy" principle. That is, government beginning in the community and spreading upwards to the national level. If anything, the antithesis of what might be implicated in the OECD report.

Of course, I cannot encapsulate these books in the time available but we can note certain contrasts in the Canadian and American tapestries of educational culture. Clearly, the Americans have problems which we do not, and conversely. Their ethnic, crime, discipline and finance problems alone might cause some American administrators to think that we dwell in a kind of Paradise. A partial explanation, perhaps, of our sense of complacency. But is this an aspect of their more advanced socio-economic evolution and, if so, could we profit from our retardation by learning in advance?

On the other side of the ledger we do have bi-and-bi, a home-grown problem which makes America seem blissfully, unilingually monolithic. It may be heretical, if not yet illegal, to say this in a location so close to Ottawa but there are those among us -- policymakers at that -- who would not mind re-examining Lord Durham's proposals for univocality in a new constitutional era. And they might point to Louisiana and Maine, but don't get me wrong. I am for whatever, in the end, the New Canada is for - but I do not think we need, then or now, to accept uncritically the unexamined assumption that two languages are necessarily enriching. Logically, they may as well be culturally impoverishing.

In the end, no matter what we choose to learn from the American discipline, we shall as policy makers have to choose between strategies. At one extreme there is the possibility, perhaps peculiarly appropriate in times of crisis, of rational comprehensive planning. This is implicit in the

in the OECD report. Rational, comprehensive, planning. That says it all. The policy makers would seek the best of all worlds by considering all possible possibilities, by separating values from facts, ends from means, any by optimizing satisfactions so that there would be a Canadian pie in the sky, by and by.

At the other extreme we have the option of "muddling through."[8] Fact and value, ends and means would be inextricably intertwined. Only small decisions would be made and these, at the margin of action. The strongest commitment would be to preservation of the status quo consistent with incremental and evolutionary growth. Note that the first of these extremes is traditionally associated with the European continent (martial Prussia and logical France) whilst the latter is characteristically Anglo-Saxon.

Between the extremes lies a sort of "Noble Middle Path" which I advocate and which has been best described and expounded by Amitai Etzioni as "mixed scanning."[9] In this scheme periodical rational appreciations would be combined with pragmatic incrementalism and success or failure would be highly correlated with intuitive and analytic skill.

In the emergent New Canada the scenario might read like this. We are in a period of "re-Confederation." The most reasonable prediction is a continuation of the Canadian nation, true to its spirit of compromising genius, in a form not dissimilar from its present one but with regionalist decentralization and increased provisions for provincial opting-in and opting-out of Federal initiatives. There may be a new *de jure* Constitution; certainly there will be a new *de facto* one. The French fact will persist and its intrinsic divisiveness will have to be accommodated. It is an imponderable question whether education will be seriously considered by the politicians as instrumental to this end. And throughout, thank God, we shall retain certain characteristics of our dull, grey Northern spirit: an American propensity for pragmatic policy-making, a British propensity for justice, a Gallic flair for order.[10]

So what may we conclude from this foreshortened evaluation? Well, I am reluctant to come out with it but it is entirely consistent with all of the foregoing logic and with all that we know about the Canadian style.

With temerity, then, we need another Royal Commission. Re-Confederation is a time for Re-Appreciation.[11] The terms of reference of such a Commission on Education should be, *pace* Lord Robbins, to "review the pattern of education in Canada and in the light of national needs and resources advise on what principles its future development should be based."[12] Such an appreciation undertaken at such a time, amidst the very throes of re-constitution, would provide the ground for policy moves according to both the rational synoptic model and the more congenial and familiar mode of incrementalism. It would release the potentialities of mixed-scanning and permit on-going re-evaluation of Canadian edcuation in a manner consistent with our traditions. The time is right.

And why should we be dismayed if this conclusion does not flame, convuise, inspire? It is, after all, typically Canadian.

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